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THE NATURE OF FICTION

JESSIE REHDER



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The Magic of the Movies, by Kai Jurgensen

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University of North Carolina English Department



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APPROACHING THE NOVEL

To tabulate a writer's work is often as futile as pinning down a butterfly, but sometimes we have to do it. For a discussion of techniques in narrative, *A Handbook of Literature*, by Thrall and Hibbard offers a definition of any word we may want to use. We can explore the picaresque or rogue novel, the romantic allegory, the apprenticeship story, or the plot of episode. Once we are familiar with these terms, it is easy to go ahead to a discussion of the story itself.

Suppose we start with style. In *Wuthering Heights*, for instance, the clumsiness of the style, so apparent in the book's beginning, soon fades. In its place come the tumultuous, enchanted words, arranged in a pattern of terror. *Wuthering Heights*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Look Homeward Angel*, each has a language peculiar to itself through which we come to understand the people in the book and the action that is integral to them.

Now and then, this action, or plot, may be subservient to style. We have to ask ourselves how important the action is. Where does it begin? Where does it end? Is it a series of episodes, or is the structure crucial so that the actions of each character are part of the author's counterpoint, leading his creations and his readers to an inevitable end?

In Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel*, Eugene Gant is the person on whom the plot, and the book itself, hangs, but obviously, this merging of the plot with one character does not always take place. In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, for instance, Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak are of almost equal stature. And with Hardy, more than with most authors, the minor characters have an importance that is often hidden at first glance.

Hardy's people are truly part of their setting. The Wessex he has created with the stars rolling in the winter sky, the storm threatening the harvest, the fire devouring the hayricks—this Wessex is the other half of Gabriel, Bathsheba, Boldwood, of all the people in the book. The mood of the countryside is their mood. What they do, think, feel, and even in the end what their fate is, depends to a great extent on the rural England in which they have their being.

Their fate depends on what happens to them in their natural setting. After style, plot, character, and locale fuse together in any novel, the destiny of the people who are involved is evident. Then we come to the kernel of the book. It has been said more than once that the theme of any great novel can be expressed in one phrase. *Of Human*

Bondage, for instance, is a capsule expression of what the author says in many ways and over a time span that embraces forty years of Philip Carey's life. Man is born, he suffers, and he dies. Maugham tells us that in every way he can.

To accept this is to accept life from Maugham's point of view. The viewpoint of the author and the characters—sometimes it coincides—is vital. One critic has gone so far as to assert that the whole intricate question of method in fiction is governed by the point of view. Obviously, the theme is expounded through the method the author chooses.

The writer may tell the story in the first person through the eyes of one of the characters. On the other hand, he may focus on one character but reserve the right of commenting for himself. Finally, the author may take an omnipotent point of view, playing God, foreseeing the destiny of one or of all of the people he has created.

Whatever the point of view, the setting, the plot, or the mood, the success of the book, as E. M. Forster points out in *Aspects of the Novel*, lies in the power of the writer to bring us to his own way of thinking, to help us see the world he has created, and to make us accept that world. If the author is able to do these things, then all the rest falls into place.

1. TERMS AND TECHNIQUES

A Handbook of Literature, by Thrall and Hibbard

Discuss the following: irony, realism, symbolism, satire, crisis.

What type of novel is *Of Human Bondage*? Why is *The Scarlet Letter* a romantic allegory?

In what ways does a novelist like Thomas Hardy merge setting with character?

Define the word *fiction* in the way that best satisfies you.

2. VIEWING THE NOVEL

Aspects of the Novel, by E. M. Forster

Do you believe that E. M. Forster justifies his comment that the narrative form is "distinctly one of the moister areas of literature—irrigated by a hundred rills and occasionally degenerating into a swamp."?

What writers outside of England does Mr. Forster cite as examples of what is best in fiction?

Comment on technical differences in the novel and the short story.

Additional Reading:

The Craft of Fiction, by Percy Lubbock, 1945. Peter Smith, N. Y.

HUCKLEBERRY FINN: Mark Twain

One of the most interesting things about Mark Twain's saga of boyhood and the Mississippi River is the point of view of the novel. We see the world through Huck's eyes but we never actually know whether Huck or his creator is conducting the tour. Sometimes, as in the famous circus scene, Huck appears to be almost incredibly naive, accepting without question everything that happens. At other moments, as in his plan to escape from the cabin where Pap has confined him, the boy shows an amazing perspicacity.

This inconsistency of character, so apparent in Huck, does not appear in any of the other people in the novel. Pap, whose eyes seem to be looking out from behind vines, Jim with his black face and great heart, the King with his fatal flaw of greed, are all of one piece. This consistency of personality is particularly true of the minor figures, of Judge Thatcher, Mrs. Loftus, and of Colonel Sherburn.

The scene with Mrs. Loftus, in which the frontier housewife so easily penetrates Huck's disguise as a girl, is one of the most revealing in the novel. Not only does Twain catch the exact relationship between the boy and the woman, but he reproduces, through the personality of Mrs. Loftus, many of the qualities that were dominant in pioneer America. Mrs. Loftus is canny, practical, and perceptive in everything, including her directions to Huck.

"And when you throw at a rat or anything, hitch yourself up a-tiptoe and fetch your hand up above your head as awkward as you can, and miss your rat about six or seven foot . . . I spotted you for a boy when you were threading the needle."

After she has spotted Huck, and has given him the news that her husband is going to start out for Jackson's island to hunt Jim, the voyage on the raft begins. This is a fabulous, an enchanted journey, in which Twain reproduces the many moods of the river. Having read the book, who can ever forget the storm on the island with the wind bending the trees and turning up the pale underside of the leaves? Who can forget the thunder that goes rumbling, grumbling, tumbling down the sky towards the underside of the world?

The description of the storm is only one of the many pastoral interludes. The most famous of these comes in the time of solitude spent on the raft before the King and the Duke arrive to spoil this natural paradise. We feel the beauty of the river in those moments

when the nice breeze springs up and comes fanning the raft from over there, so cool and sweet and fresh to smell on account of the woods and the flowers.

The rank odor arrives when the Duke and the King come aboard. These two are bad actors. Impersonating a pirate, the King cheats the people at the camp meeting. With the theatrical extravaganza, "The Royal Nonesuch," Royalty defrauds its audience. In the Wilkes episode an attempt is made to cheat the heirs of the dead man and to sell his slaves down the river. The final low point in human behavior comes when the King turns Jim back into bondage.

The status of Jim lies at the heart of the book. He is truly an heroic character. The most moving writing Twain does is in his explanation of Huck's growing realization that Jim is a human being rather than a piece of property worth eight hundred dollars. The love Huck feels for Jim is beautifully expressed in the scene in which the boy recalls what Jim has meant to him during the time they have spent together.

Once Huck has fully accepted Jim as a friend, the falling action of the book begins. Jim's fake escape from the Phelps plantation, directed by the too nimble brain of Tom Sawyer, turns into a sad burlesque. With a yawn, we read through descriptions of shirt stealing and spoon stealing. But even this last, unsuccessful comic episode cannot dull the beauty of the voyage down the river. For as Bernard De Voto has pointed out, this journey is one of strangeness mixed with horror. It has a greatness we cannot analyse and to which we always return.

I. FRONTIER AMERICA

Huck Finn

What actual experiences had Twain had on the river?

Why is the feud episode presented satirically?

What geographical regions does the novel cover? How long is the river voyage? What is the approximate time of the book?

Discuss Twain's opinion of what he called "the damned human race."

Characterize some of the frontier types the author has created in the novel.

2. HUCK FINN AND HIS COMPANIONS

Huck Finn

Comment on the superstitions in which Huck and Jim believe.

On what plane is the humor of the novel?

What is Pap's attitude towards government?

Discuss the scenes in which Huck comes in contact with violence. Examples are the lynching bee, the feud, and the shooting of Tom Sawyer.

Comment on the change in Huck's attitude towards Jim.

Additional Reading:

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, by Mark Twain, 1876. World Pub. Co.

Roughing It, by Mark Twain, 1899. Harper.

The Rivers of America Series, Rinehart.

The Ordeal of Mark Twain, by Van Wyck Brooks, 1920. Dutton.

Mark Twain at Work, by Bernard De Voto, 1942. Harvard Press.

THE SCARLET LETTER: Nathaniel Hawthorne

In reading Hawthorne's novel, one of our first assumptions should be that the passion of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale was the mortal sin the Puritans believed it to be. We may assume, too, that the husband of Hester, once he is aware of the secret and sets out to take his revenge, is the most guilty of the three people involved. This because Roger Chillingworth's sin is deliberate, premeditated, and rooted deep—as is Hawthorne's black flower—in the heart of a man whose one desire is for revenge.

Of the main characters, the woman changes most openly. Through the offices of the scarlet letter, Hester moves from the status of a passionate girl into that of a mature, disciplined person. For the obvious reason that her sin is forced into the open, she gets the best of it all. The preacher, that remorseful and subtle hypocrite, is destroyed in the end by his secret. As for Chillingworth, he himself points out that his revenge is never satisfactory. As the minister disintegrates, Roger dies with him, poisoned by his own hatred.

Little Pearl, the elf child, who is the result of the breaking of a great natural law, is more a projection of the conscience of the parents than an individual. It is hard to believe that Pearl is at any time a real child, and perhaps Hawthorne never intended her to be. Perhaps she is only one more of the many symbols with which the novel is freighted.

These symbols are peculiarly appropriate. Early in the book, the ragweed near the prison is set against the wild rose that grows beside it. Then there is the black flower growing out of the dead man's heart, and the other flowers that blossom in the forest near the settlement. These woods, where Mistress Hibbins meets the black man, are an allegory in themselves, as are the letter that Hester wears on her bosom, and the secret penances of the Reverend Dimmesdale.

The penances, so true to the Calvinist tradition, fit well into the Puritan picture. There are fasts, vigils, and flagellation. In one sense, they represent the communal penance of a society where sinners, constantly in the hands of an angry God, felt forced to burn witches, pillory adulteresses, and sometimes fly away with the Devil after consorting with him during dramatic revels in the forest.

The guilt feeling of the Puritans is only one part of the communal portrait Hawthorne paints for us. In the crowd scenes, we see the representatives of government with their Elizabethan ruffs, their embroidered gloves, and their somber faces. We meet the lesser folk in

their steepled hats. At the edge of the woods are the Indians, bringing the frontier with its tomahawks and wampum into the middle of the little world where the drama is taking place.

Once we have accepted Hawthorne's world, his drama becomes one of the most absorbing in our literature. If we like, we can simply follow the fortunes of the people involved, probing into their souls with the author and going with them to the right, true end to which he brings them. After we have passed the barriers of style and pace that set the book down in its own time, we find that Hawthorne has written what is, in its way, a detective story. Certainly, it is a fascinating investigation of sin and of its consequences.

But there is a deeper significance to the story, a feeling of fate and of inevitability that mark it as a great novel. In one of the most moving of the paragraphs, Chillingworth himself points out that the sin of Hester and Arthur, even though it was mortal, contained only the germ of evil. The lovers are not sinful except in a kind of typical illusion, nor is Roger fiend-like for all of his passion for revenge. It has all been a dark necessity and the black flower must blossom as it will.

1. THE PURITAN CONSCIENCE

The Scarlet Letter

When the novel opens, how long have the Puritans been settled in America?

Comment on the scarlet letter as a symbol of guilt.

Comment on the other symbols used by the author.

Is Chillingworth, in a sense, a psychiatrist? What are his methods of dealing with his patients?

Account for the dual nature of little Pearl's personality.

Why was the love of Hester and the minister a mortal sin?

In what ways does the minister do penance?

2. HAWTHORNE AND HIS NOVEL

The Scarlet Letter

Where does the Custom House section of the novel take place?

What is the author's occupation at the time he begins to work on his book?

For what reason does he change his occupation?

How did the writer come upon the material for his novel?

Comment on the difficulties Hawthorne encountered in attempting to find the right pattern for the story of the scarlet letter.

Additional Reading:

The Flowering of New England, by Van Wyck Brooks, 1933. Dutton.

The Marble Faun, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1860. Dutton.

Hawthorne: A Study in Solitude, by Herbert Gorman, 1927. Doran.

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD: Thomas Hardy

This pastoral novel is one of the most satisfying of the stories the author has written. The book has all the Hardy elements—the rustics, the intimacy with the countryside, the fully drawn characters moving slowly towards their fate. It has, too, a lightness that fades away in Hardy's later efforts. Even in the tragic moments, and they are many, we feel that the lovely, sunny nature of the region mitigates the blackness of the events.

Essentially, the book is a study of the relationship of five Wessex characters to each other and to nature. In the opening scenes we meet Farmer Oak who is "at the brightest period of masculine growth, for his intellect and his emotions were clearly separated . . . he was twenty-eight and a bachelor." We come to know Bathsheba Everdene whose beauty at once touches the farmer and whose vanity brings him so much sorrow. Later, this same vanity helps bring death to the soldier Troy and imprisonment to Boldwood, the prosperous squire of the neighborhood.

In *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy used the plot framework he began to evolve early in his writing and never deserted. There is a man, in this case Gabriel Oak, who falls in love with a woman. The author then introduces a second man, Boldwood, who also becomes infatuated with Bathsheba. Now another male character, the glittering Troy. The pitiful Fanny Robin comes into the picture but soon meets tragedy. Two of the men, Boldwood and Troy, dispose of each other, leaving the original couple free for what might be called a tranquil ending.

But this is only the framework. Hardy elaborates on this framework by keeping the central figures constantly in touch with nature. We have the loss of Gabriel's sheep, the change in Bathsheba from a poverty stricken girl to the proprietor of one of the district's largest farms. We have the harvest, the dancing festival, the sheep fair in which the entire community takes part and to which the main characters in our story go.

Events and people have an authenticity which rises from the author's intimate knowledge of the pastoral setting and its inhabitants. Once Hardy was asked if many of his characters were taken from life. "Oh, yes, almost all of them," he replied. "Bathsheba Everdene was my own aunt . . . Shepherd Oak I knew well when I was a boy." As for the various locales, nobody could have written of the progress of Fanny

Robin's death cart, of the burning of the hayricks, or of the shearing of the sheep, unless he had been at those places.

Often, Hardy was clumsy in his methods of arriving at the tragedy. But no reader will mind that, for above the means the author uses, more important than the glinting English fields, and beyond the rustic characters, is the brooding sense of fate that dominates all of Hardy's work. Inherent in this fate idea is the author's belief that in the end our actions cannot change or alter the course of our lives.

One of the plainest expressions of Hardy's philosophy is put into the mouth of the laborer Henry who declares that your lot is your lot and the Scripture is nothing. Fortunately, in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, the lot of Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba Everdene is a good one. But Hardy lets us know that it is not so good as it might have been. In the final sentence of the novel, one of the characters emphasizes that fact. But he does add, "since 'tis as 'tis, it might have been worse, I feel my thanks accordingly."

1. HARDY'S IMAGINARY WORLD

Far from the Madding Crowd

Using a map of Dorsetshire, find the approximate region of the novel.

Comment on the descriptions of nature including the storms, the seasons, the lamb shearing, and the hay-making.

Discuss some of the customs of the countryside.

Contrast Hardy's rustics with those created by Shakespeare in his plays.

From where did the name *Wessex* come?

2. THE ACTION AND THE PEOPLE

Far from the Madding Crowd

What is the basic plot structure of the novel?

Contrast the character of Oak to that of the other rustics.

What is Bathsheba's attitude towards Troy? Towards Oak? Towards Boldwood?

Discuss the minor women characters. Are they of much importance to the novel?

Comment on Hardy's basic philosophy as he expresses it through the people he has created.

Additional Reading:

The Return of the Native, by Thomas Hardy, 1895. Harper.

Collected Poems, by Thomas Hardy, 1923. Macmillan.

Thomas Hardy's Wessex, by Hermann Lea, 1913. Macmillan.

Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy, by Albert P. Elliott, 1935. University of Pennsylvania.

CHAPTER V

THE TURN OF THE SCREW: Henry James

Henry James has written the story of two charming English children and of their sinister entanglement with the ghosts of a governess and a valet. He shows the scene to the reader through the eyes of the new governess who comes into the picture too late to undo the evil that has been done but who attempts, and partially succeeds, in a regeneration of her small charges. James has used his own unique and involved style, so that we follow the story through torturous turns.

We continually feel a double twist in the horror that is nebulous and at the same time sharp. From the first appearance of Quint on the roof, we know that something evil is in the air. When we see him standing there, high up, beyond the lawn, at the very top of the tower, we sense at once the horror he brings with him. And yet, even at the very end of the story, we are never quite sure just what that horror is.

We do know that Quint is always in touch with Miles, the boy, and that his influence is a deeply terrifying one. Something has happened at the school—in the beginning we are not certain what it is—to send Miles back home in disgrace. The child does not seem to feel the disgrace; he does not admit it even to himself until too late. But it is there. It is more forcefully there because of the beauty of the boy.

Miss Jessel brings added agony and it is peculiarly appropriate that she should bring it to the little girl, Flora. One of the most subtle and most chilling of the scenes is at the lake, where the child refuses to admit the presence of Miss Jessel, thereby endangering the reputation of the new governess in the eyes of the housekeeper, and also bringing to the governess herself a deep sense of insecurity. Did the evil really exist? In asking herself this question, the new teacher comes close to a loss of her own sanity.

And no wonder, for who could believe that the powers of darkness could have so much strength in a setting of such serenity? This setting, which stands in such beautiful disharmony to the events, creates much of the poignancy with which the tale is permeated. There is the English country house, well appointed and comfortable. There is the church, the garden, the school from which little Miles has been sent home. All these bring a sense of well being which is eternally dissipated by the presence of the shades of Quint and Miss Jessel.

There is a question of whether *The Turn of the Screw* is really a ghost story at all. Of course, it has the appurtenances of one, but there is far more to consider than the presence of the revenants. All through

the tale, the implication of evil is stronger than the ghosts and than the characters in the story. At certain points, the evil even seems to be stronger than the author. This point is an interesting one in regard to a writer like Henry James who usually has his material so well in hand. In *The Turn of the Screw*, more than in any of his other works, James deals with the "element of the unnamed and untouched." Or perhaps, more accurately, it deals with him.

1. THE STORY AND THE PEOPLE

The Turn of the Screw

Contrast the character of the new governess with that of Miss Jessel.

Justify, if you feel that it can be justified, the attitude of the guardian of the two children towards his charges.

Would one be able to find this particular kind of country house in the England of today?

What offense had Miles committed at the school?

What is the position of Mrs. Grose? Is she sympathetic towards the efforts of the new governess?

Do we ever know what is going on in the minds of the children or do we always see them from the outside?

2. THE INDIVIDUALITY OF HENRY JAMES' WRITINGS

The Turn of the Screw

Is the story, in essence, a novella, or is it fat enough to be called a novel?

How does the author avoid the usual conventional trappings for the ghosts?

Why were the children in peril? How does James make the reader conscious of the danger?

Do the ghosts ever really materialize except in the mind of the governess?

Additional Reading:

The Portrait of a Lady, by Henry James, 1881. Modern Library.

The James Family, by F. O. Matthiessen, 1947. Knopf.

A HIGH WIND IN JAMAICA: Richard Hughes

On the surface, the story that Richard Hughes sets out to tell seems highly improbable. In *A High Wind in Jamaica*, he narrates the curious tale of a group of children who are kidnapped by pirates in the West Indies during the latter days of the 19th Century. In the end, the children rather than the seamen become the villains of the tale.

Although the book gives the illusion of getting away to a slow start, each of the scenes in the beginning is necessary for the building of the proper atmosphere. The lushness of the tropics, the visit to the seashore, the earthquake which catches the children away from home, and especially the death of the tomcat after his unsuccessful race with the wild creatures of the jungle, are all part of the curiously elaborate pattern Mr. Hughes has chosen.

The important events are not so much those that take place as those that do not take place. There are, of course, happenings enough, the wounding of the girl Emily and the killing of the Dutchman among them. But the important thing is that we keep feeling the imminence of a terror that is outside of actuality, a fright of what might have happened, or perhaps did happen but is not incorporated in the story.

Even the most violent of the events is described obliquely. During the first interval the children spend ashore, which is curious enough in itself, the boy John takes a brutal fall and breaks his neck. But we never know the effect of the death on the other children. When they realize he is gone, nobody comments on his absence. "... neither then nor thereafter was his name ever mentioned by anybody: and if you had known the children intimately you would have never guessed from them that he had ever existed."

Forgetting him, or apparently forgetting him, they continue their innocent voyage. Hughes is at his best in describing this journey and the ship on which it takes place. Along with the children, we meet a number of animals incongruously placed on shipboard. These animals are described as if they are people. Very much in the foreground is the big pig who goes overboard during a squall, "... his snout (sometimes) sticking manfully out of the water. God, Who had sent him the goat and the monkey for a sign, now required his soul of him."

God also requires the soul of the Dutch captain whose murder takes place during one of the most fantastic circus scenes in literature. Here is a heroic circus, with tigers, a lion, and their Malay keepers all put

down in the center of a steaming ocean. Over the animals, the keepers, and the spectators, falls the terror that Hughes is so expert at creating.

This terror touches all of the characters, the pathetic Margaret, the boy Harry, and the child Rachel. We feel it most in the descriptions of the relationship of Emily to the sailors. The triangle of the girl, the captain and the mate—incidentally, the sailors are sharply drawn—is a compelling one. All these people, constantly in flux, are at one moment heroic and at the next villainous.

But there are no villains in the accepted sense. Or perhaps, the true evil lies in the great gulf that separates the world of the adults from that of their passengers. As one critic has pointed out, Hughes stresses and stresses again, “. . . the complete disparity between the two worlds of childhood and maturity which are materially the same world. The difference is psychological and results in wholly different standards.”

Beyond this difference is the eternal question of good and evil as they exist not only on a single ship but everywhere. Mr. Hughes does not try to answer any questions. He simply presents a great problem in terms of the world he has created. When we leave this world we feel a deep sorrow for the sailors who have come to a tragic end. But we feel just as deep a sorrow for the children who were the cause of the tragedy.

1. THE LOCALE OF THE NOVEL

A High Wind in Jamaica

What is the purpose of the storm in the early part of the book?

Is the death of the tomcat used symbolically?

Does the life of the children on the ship seem probable or even possible?

Comment on the storm scenes.

2. THE CHARACTERS OF THE CHILDREN

A High Wind in Jamaica

Could the girl Emily be held responsible for the murder she commits?

Why is John never characterized very clearly?

Do these children's reactions at the circus have anything in common with the reactions of Huck Finn in the Twain novel?

Why did Hughes at one time title his book, *The Innocent Voyage*?

Additional Reading:

In Hazard, by Richard Hughes, 1938. Harper.

South Wind, by Norman Douglas, Modern Library.

CHAPTER VII

A PASSAGE TO INDIA: E. M. Forster

Mr. Forster makes his characters real by building them with his usual meticulous care. When we begin the book, there are so many threads and so many preliminary scenes that we sometimes wonder just where all this is leading. But the novel has that main requisite of a good book in that it all fits together from the first description of the country near the Marabar Caves to the last damning indictment of the English by Aziz, after the conflict has apparently been settled.

This conflict rises, or rather flares up, after the trip to the Caves which is taken by the English ladies and their Indian host. First, there is the confusion of the ladies believing that Doctor Aziz has forgotten about the invitation he offered them, while on his part the doctor feels that he is most certainly in a position of having pushed himself forward, which is the last thing he wants to do. Then, almost at once, there is the trouble that comes when Fielding is left behind at the railroad gate. Everything seems to conspire for tragedy, and yet a strange beauty hangs over the excursion.

At the beginning of the journey, the night is still dark. As dawn comes, we go into the purdah carriage with the ladies and with the paraphernalia for the picnic. Among other things are the melon wearing a fez and the box bound with brass. But the real point, here at dawn in the carriage, is that nobody is as yet race conscious. The ladies treat Aziz as they would treat any young man who is kind to them. He simply treats them with the politeness that is native to him.

With Mrs. Moore's hallucination in the cave, we get our first premonition of how wrong things are. The dark air is heavy, and the people themselves are heavy with their own fears, their own insecurities, and their own frustrations. It is out of Miss Quested's feeling of hesitancy regarding her marriage that the mistake of thinking Aziz has made advances to her arises. All in a moment, the happiness of the morning is gone.

Once the mistake has been made, and the righteous superiority of the English in this little outpost of Empire is aroused, the real trouble begins. Here are race riots, hidden hatreds, preposterous accusations. On one side are the English, hanging together with the exception of Fielding, straining every nerve to keep themselves on the heights where they feel they rightly belong. On the other side are the Indians—and nobody is right.

This feeling of nobody's being right is at the heart of the book. Often it is subdued to the fine descriptions of the country, or to a scene like the one in which Fielding makes his first visit to his Indian friends. Sometimes, we feel that East and West have almost met successfully, as in the temple with Mrs. Moore and Aziz. They at once feel a bond that transcends their racial differences but this intimacy does not last long. By the end of the story, Mrs. Moore is dead and Aziz has turned against his dearest English friend.

No, nobody is right unless it is Fielding. At least he understands more than the others. He knows, for example, that it is futile for Miss Quested to write a letter of apology. Any letter would be a failure because she has no real affection for Aziz or for the Indians. And the Indians know that. They are not satisfied with justice but want love and more love, which is a thing they will never get from the English.

"Justice never satisfies them," says Fielding. "That is why the British Empire rests on sand."

We feel the sands of Empire running low, we see the antagonism rising, although it is not brought into the open until the last of the book. Then Aziz, who is the victim and at the same time the victor in the sad war the novel recounts, does at last tell Fielding the truth about what he has come to feel.

"Clear out, clear out, I say. Why are we put to so much suffering? We used to blame you, now we blame ourselves, we grow wiser. Until England is in difficulties, we keep silent, but in the next European war—aha, aha! Then is our time."

Nowadays, when we read what Aziz had to say, we feel that *A Passage to India* was not so much a novel as a prophecy.

1. THE TIME ELEMENT IN THE NOVEL

A Passage to India

Do you feel that the book is dated? Or is what Forster has to say about racial prejudice still true?

What period of British rule in India does the book cover?

Is there, at the present time, the same caste system in India that Forster describes?

Comment on the way the author uses the element of time to illuminate the relationship of his characters to each other.

2. THE SETTING

A Passage to India

Why is the setting so integral to the novel?

Of what significance are the Caves?

Is the scene in the Hindu temple used symbolically?

Why do the British feel that their club is their citadel?

Comment on the native State scenes and the ways in which they differ from the earlier locales in the book.

Additional Reading:

The Longest Journey, by E. M. Forster, 1922. Knopf.

Plain Tales from the Hills, by Rudyard Kipling, 1899. Doubleday McClure Co.

Black Boy, by Richard Wright, 1945. Harper.

OF HUMAN BONDAGE: Somerset Maugham

Maugham's novel offers the reader so much to think about that it is difficult to take any one approach to the book. But if, out of the welter of characters and scenes, any one high point emerges this is the evolution of Philip Carey's philosophy as he moves through the years from boyhood to maturity.

If we start with Philip in his uncle's household, we find a lonely, handicapped boy, thrust out of his natural environment by the death of his parents, and pushed into the home of an English clergyman. A good example of Philip's dislocation at the Vicarage is the confusion that comes to the boy when he is forced to read from a Liturgy that means nothing to him. Perhaps the first hint of the code of living that Philip later finds for himself lies in the very different and pleasurable response the child has to the book about the Levant which is put into his hands by his aunt. This book brings the first hint of the color and the beauty of the East.

In the interval at the King's School very little happens to change Philip's conventional attitude towards life. He is confirmed in the Church of England, offers his clubfoot as a sacrifice to the God who loves him, and almost at once feels the sense of regret and distaste that is native to his character. But not until he leaves the school for Germany does he get his first inkling of what for him is a very comforting truth regarding man's place in the universe.

From Weeks, the American student, Philip discovers that it is possible to be virtuous without believing in a Supreme Being. With this knowledge comes his first taste of freedom, a freedom that comes to bloom in the Bohemian Paris to which he moves after deciding to become a painter. The Paris interval is crowded, colorful, and stimulating in many ways. But in a philosophical sense, it does not bring Philip very near his goal of finding the meaning of life.

In Paris, Philip listens often to his friend the poet who is drinking himself to death. Follow your instincts, says Cronshaw. Always follow them, but be sure and have due regard for the policeman society always keeps at the corner. To Philip, this seems a good rule. Being cautious by nature, he decides that unlike Cronshaw he, himself, will follow standards of conduct that will enable him to control his instincts.

From his entanglement with Mildred, Philip learns that no standards are of any help. He learns, too, through the riddle of the Persian rug, that life is meaningless. The reaching of this conclusion brings

him his first real freedom. That his philosophy is a negative one saddens him but does not deter him from his old quest of finding out man's relationship to himself and to the world.

In the end, Philip comes to this conclusion: man is born, he suffers, he dies, and that is all. In spite of this, Philip intends to make a varied pattern of existence, a pattern that includes grief, joy, love, beauty. But there is always the realization that he, himself, is of no importance in the scheme of things. This, of course, is at the root of all he does.

But the pattern, based on nothing, is exceedingly varied. There is his life with Sally, his friendship with her family, his freedom from the shadow of Mildred, and his acceptance of the tremendous drama of life. Above all is his conviction that in his own way he can find a happiness that will in a sense compensate for the years of bondage that Maugham has portrayed so powerfully.

1. THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Of Human Bondage

Comment on some of the teachers with whom Philip comes in contact.

Give examples of the parsimony of the Vicar.

Describe some of the women in the novel: Miss Wilkinson, Aunt Louisa, Mildred Rogers.

What, in the end, is Philip's attitude towards Mildred?

Why does Maugham describe her as odiously genteel?

What are some of the ways in which Philip is handicapped by his clubfoot?

2. ESTHETIC INFLUENCES ON PHILIP CAREY

Of Human Bondage

Discuss Impressionism.

Comment on the death of Cronshaw.

What does Philip mean when he says that no painter has shown more pitilessly than El Greco that the world is but a place of passage?

Why does Philip decide to give up his art career?

Does Philip see the world through the eyes of an artist or those of a physician?

What great attraction does Spain hold for him?

Additional Reading:

The Way of All Flesh, by Samuel Butler. Modern Library.

The Moon and Sixpence, by Somerset Maugham. Modern Library.

The Summing Up, by Somerset Maugham, 1938. Doubleday.

THE SUN ALSO RISES: Ernest Hemingway

The characters in this early Hemingway novel have a haunting familiarity, the talk is talk we have heard many times before, the events that happen could not happen otherwise. And yet, the reality, if it ever existed, has gone. The Paris of the Twenties, the Spain of the fiesta, and the people who pause in these places, are from a world that will not come again.

Even the Great War, out of which the situation of the book rises, is part of a forgotten picture. Perhaps this archaic quality comes from the fact that all of us have seen so many changes during the years since the book was published. This novel simply couldn't happen now. Americans go to Paris these days to work first and have amusement afterwards—only there is very little amusement. The British cannot travel on the Continent. They don't have enough money.

Of course, the Mike and Brett of the novel did not have money either. Hemingway tells us that most of Brett's income goes to the money-lenders. As for Mike, he is that fabulous creature, the upper-class bankrupt, who manages to live, breathe, and have his being on less than nothing a year. But Mike and Brett do get around. They get from England to Paris. They go to the bull fights in Pamplona, move on to the Riviera, and then seem ready to start the cycle of futility all over again.

To repeat, they get around and yet seem to be figures from a museum. Not only Mike and Brett, but the other characters in the book, Bill Gorton who is the lover of stuffed animals, the fabulous Count with his chauffeur and his champagne, and Robert Cohn, the young man who must prove his superiority by knocking everybody else down—all these people are arrested in time.

Jake, the narrator of the story, is presented as being spiritually as well as physically impotent. We are not asked to have any sympathy for him, we are simply asked to accept him. Much of the time, the death-quality is what we feel most in Jake but he does come to life now and then, notably on the fishing trip which he takes into the mountains with his friend Bill Gorton.

Of all the intervals in the book, this fishing trip has the most sparkle. In recounting it, Hemingway appeals sharply to the reader's senses. As Jake prepares for the trip, we feel the coolness of the early morning when the sun has not yet dried the dew that had come when the wind had gone down. After the fish have been caught, and we see them lying in the basket packed with ferns, we share the sense of comfort and well-being that comes to Jake and his friend.

This comfort lasts far too short a time. As soon as the fishing is over, we return to the fiesta, to the intervals of drinking—wine, absinthe, brandy, more wine. We come back to futility as it is represented by Mike, by Cohn, by every one of the people on the party. This futility is epitomized by the affair Lady Brett has with the bull-fighter, and by the worthlessness of what these two people offer each other.

This worthlessness, or death-quality, is the thesis of the book. Many of the post-war writers of the Twenties, Faulkner, Caldwell, Fitzgerald, elaborated on it in one way or another. T. S. Eliot, in his poem, "*The Wasteland*," has told us that the way the world dies is not with a bang but with a whimper. And Hemingway, in this early novel, proclaims that each of us is in his prison.

But even the prison is sometimes an illusion. Gertrude Stein was saying that when she asserted that Brett, Jake, Bill, and their living counterparts, were all of a lost generation. Looking back on them from today, we feel not so much that they were lost as that they never existed.

1. THE AFTERMATH OF A WAR

The Sun Also Rises

In what ways is the effect of the war on the lives of the characters emphasized?

Do you think Lady Brett is responsible for her own laxness or is a victim of circumstance?

Is Robert Cohn presented as a sympathetic character? Do the other people in the book understand his point of view?

To what conclusion does Jake come in the last lines of the novel? In what way do Brett's question and Jake's answer give us a clue to the theme of the book?

2. RECURRENT THEMES IN HEMINGWAY'S WRITINGS

The Sun Also Rises

Comment on the bull fighting scenes.

In what ways does Brett's disillusionment with life resemble that of Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*?

In what other of his novels does the author deal with people who have been uprooted from their countries?

Discuss the instinct for legends, symbols, and for sacraments that is apparent in Hemingway.

Additional Reading:

Paris Was Our Mistress, by Samuel Putnam, 1947. Viking.

"*The Wasteland*," (1922) in *Collected Poems*, (1909-1935) by T. S. Eliot, Harcourt.

The Great Gatsby, by Scott Fitzgerald, 1925. Scribner.

For Whom the Bell Tolls, by Ernest Hemingway, 1940, Blakiston.

CHAPTER X

ARROWSMITH: Sinclair Lewis

This Pulitzer prize novel of the Twenties—incidentally, the author refused the prize as a protest against the sterility and regimentation of American writing—still stands up well as an example of the vitality of the early Sinclair Lewis. From our introduction to Martin Arrowsmith, which takes place in the late part of the last century, to the time of his maturity after World War I, we watch the author, through the character he has created, rant, rave, laugh and sometimes weep, as he moves in the main current of American life.

The book has many moods, ranging from the tenderness and understanding of Leora Tozer to the cold efficiency of a man like Angus Duer. Each character fits well into the sprawling, jig-saw puzzle the author has made for us. We meet the president of a supposedly respectable drug peddling firm, the head of a robot university, the humanity-loving dean of a medical school. We see Martin, Terry Wickett, Tubbs, Sondelius. Above them all, particularly over Martin himself, hangs the shadow of Max Gottlieb.

In Gottlieb, Lewis has attempted to portray the man of pure science. There is a double aspect to the character, for in Gottlieb we also meet Martin's God, who forms and shapes the younger man for the career that lies ahead. Gottlieb never lets down in the demands he makes of his disciple. Early in the book, he sets the tone of their relationship in his talk to young Arrowsmith about the students who come to him with talent.

"... they are very few! They seem for some reason that is not at all clear to me to wish for some reason to become scientists . . . to work with bugs and make mistakes. These, ah, these, I seize them, I denounce them, I teach them right away the ultimate lesson of science, which is to wait and doubt . . . I demand everything." From the first, Max demands everything of Martin, and as times goes, the demands, if possible, are even more stringent.

Lewis shows us Martin in many environments. He portrays the medical school life, the attempt Martin makes to become a country doctor during his stay in Wheatsylvania, the town from which his wife comes. He shows us Martin in the atmosphere of Almus Pickerbaugh's Health Department, and in the cold air of the Rouncefield Clinic. After all this stumbling around, Martin returns to Max, and to the McGurk Institute, where he finds, or begins to find, his destiny.

The book is as crammed with detail in the New York interval, and in the plague description which follows, as it is earlier. With Sondelius,

that soldier of health, we go to the disease infected area in the West Indies and watch the doctors attempting to stamp out the plague and at the same time achieve scientific results. Tragedy for Martin comes with the loss of Leora who dies unattended in the hill house that is supposed to be such a safe refuge.

The final sections deal with Martin's realization that science does demand everything, just as Max had predicted. Only by giving up his new wife, his child, and his position in the society his wife has opened for him, can Arrowsmith approach the dedication towards which he has been working. With Terry Wickett, who is also ready to give up all for his work, Martin begins a new search for truth which is really a continuation of the old search.

In a sense, Wickett takes the place of Gottlieb, who is dead by now as are Leora and Sondelius. But for Martin, nobody can take the master's place. Or perhaps, more simply stated, Martin himself in carrying on the work to which the older man has introduced him, becomes identified with Max. For what Lewis is trying to say, after the satire of the book has been shredded away, is that the individuality of Max, of Martin, of Terry, of all men of science, must be subdued in the end to the search for truth.

1. THE SATIRE OF THE NOVEL

Arrowsmith

In what ways does Lewis scoff at the medical profession?

Does the scoffing seem dated?

Do you see Pickerbaugh as too extravagant a figure?

What type of physician does Irving Watters represent?

In what ways do the members of the McGurk Institute play politics?

Is Leora ever satirized? What type of Americans do her family, Bert, the mother, and the father, represent?

Comment on some of the ways in which small town life is satirized.

2. THE BACKGROUND OF THE NOVEL

Arrowsmith

Discuss the many and varied settings.

In the plague sequence does the author succeed in catching the atmosphere of the tropics?

In what ways does Lewis use the interval of the First World War?

Has the American culture around which the book centers altered a great deal in the years since the novel appeared?

Additional Reading:

Main Street, by Sinclair Lewis, 1921. Harcourt.

Babbitt, by Sinclair Lewis, 1922. Modern Library.

Microbe Hunters, by Paul H. de Kruif, 1926. Harcourt.

CHAPTER XI

A HANDFUL OF DUST: Evelyn Waugh

For the title of this novel of disillusionment, Evelyn Waugh turned to T. S. Eliot's poem, "The Wasteland."

"And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you,
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust."

The quotation is as dry, as brackish, and as withered as the poem from which it comes, and the tone of Waugh's novel matches the words of the title. In the book we see fear based on no reason. We see the paradox of the terror that rises out of nothing.

The time is England between two great wars, and the people are—in the main—those who used to be called the governing classes. Anthony Last, owner of Hetton Hall, which is one of the tremendous country estates that rising taxes have now made obsolete, is one of Waugh's central characters. Tony's wife, the beautiful and heartless Lady Brenda, is intimately connected with her husband's destiny. In addition, there are a host of glitteringly drawn minor figures.

The people are presented in such a brilliantly satirical manner that it is hard to recognize these comic spirits for the lost souls they are. But they are lost. To mention a few of them, there is Mr. John Beaver, the rodent of a man to whom Lady Brenda gives her love. We meet, too, Mrs. Rattery, the shameless blonde who plays cards with Tony after the death of the boy, John, and Dr. Messinger, the sterile explorer who leads Tony to an ending that is worse than death.

Of the people, John Beaver, perhaps, is the best satisfied because he is the least alive. Making a round of dinners, for which last-minute invitations have been sent him because no other extra man is available, Beaver moves in an atmosphere of atrocious self satisfaction. Even the ambiguity of his affair with Lady Brenda does not seem to disturb him. So long as he can be seen at Brats or run across the channel now and then for a fling, Beaver is cloddishly contented.

But almost all of the others are discontented. The fake princess with whom Brenda makes friends in London, the restless Polly Cockpurse, and most of her friends, are hunting for something, but they do not know what it is and will never know. Even the members of the fox hunt are shown as frustrated, unhappy people beset by hidden tensions.

Tony Last's tragedy lies in the fact that he is forced to desert the life he loves. We see Tony as a contented man at first. He has his hot-houses, his horses, his mansion. He likes the people of the village, the vicar who preaches as if he lives at an outpost of empire, the hunt master who hates to hunt, and the muscular groom. Most dear to Tony is his son, John Andrew.

The boy dies uselessly, futilely. Close on John Andrew's death comes the break-up of the Last household, the sordidly ridiculous scene with Milly at the seashore, and the final break with Brenda. All of these happenings set the stage for Tony's trip to Brazil where he hopes to find a lost city and instead gets lost himself, after the death of his companion.

The jungle episode is brilliantly done. What could be more appropriate than the lack of preparedness in the many plans the explorers make? What could be more natural than the desertion of the Indians in the forest, the death of Messinger at the water-fall, and the near-death of Tony from the fever he has contracted? And what, as final irony, could be more inevitable than the fate Tony meets with the sinister Mr. Todd?

1. THE SATIRE OF WAUGH

A Handful of Dust

What is the purpose of Tony's one scene with the princess, Abdul Akbar?

How does the author show his contempt for the clergy? For the fox-hunting set?

Could any defense be offered for Lady Brenda's behavior?

2. OH, TO BE IN ENGLAND

A Handful of Dust

Why does this novel, like the Hemingway book, seem to be a period piece?

In what way did the man who inherited Hetton Hall hope to make enough money to keep the place going?

Describe the attitude the members of the fox-hunting set have towards outsiders.

Does Waugh, at any time, convey a feeling of the poetry of the countryside of England?

Additional Reading:

Decline and Fall, by Evelyn Waugh, 1929. Chapman & Hall.

Brideshead Revisited, by Evelyn Waugh, 1945. Little.

LOOK HOMEWARD ANGEL: Thomas Wolfe

Look Homeward Angel is the beginning of what might be called a serial story, which ends only when Wolfe's life ends. Into his work he crowded all that he felt, saw, imagined. Here is a story of Eugene Gant, of George Webber, of a pilgrim, a beggar, and apprentice to life. Here is as total a record of living as one man could make, set down in poetry, in moving prose, in language that rambles, rips, moving like a great stream.

Although, in all the books, there is much of terror, and also much of the sadness and the rawness that life brings to all of us, the key to the novels lies in the vitality of the author. He was a man rushing here and there over the face of the world, absorbing, noting, blotting up impressions, only to put them down again on paper and give them to anyone who wants them. And there is always a sense of expectancy. We feel in reading Wolfe as old Gant felt at the beginning of his life. There are new lands. Our hearts lift as we move towards them.

Look Homeward Angel, far more than the books that follow it, is a record of youth, hope, disillusionment and striving. The restless quality inherent in the novel appears early. Old man Gant's arrival in the hills, his union with Eliza, and their begetting of a family, all set the stage for the appearance of Eugene. After he arrives on the scene, the book, of course, evolves through him.

But there are many unforgettable characters. There is Helen, her big gold teeth half shown in her open mouth—Helen, with her child look of belief, wonder, and scepticism. There is Ben, the idol of Eugene, who gives his brother a watch to keep time with, and who hopes that Eugene will keep it better than the rest of the family. There is old man Gant with his drinking and his slabs of marble. Above them all stands Eliza, the mother.

Always, she is picking at Eugene, pushing him, and at the same time holding him back. She is not a kind woman, or even an understanding one, but what Wolfe does do in the novel is make the reader understand her. She comes out of the pages, she walks up to meet us, she frightens us with her rush of words, she pushes us against a wall. Always, she is attempting to push Eugene, and he is always trying to get away from her.

In a sense, Margaret Leonard, the school teacher, takes the place of Eugene's mother, but nobody ever really takes Eliza's place. Even in the University interval, when Eugene is for the first time on his own, and when he begins to wallow in the beauty of books, the power

of learning, and the great breadth of the world, the shadow of his mother remains. Behind her is the shadow of Altamont, the town cradled in the hills.

Nobody has written better prose about the southern small town than Wolfe wrote. Nobody has caught the rhythm so exactly or painted the faces and the hearts of the hill people so vividly. Out of the bitter, virulent, powerful picture of the greed of the best citizens, a terrible world emerges. Eugene, in a way, gets out of this world. But he never really escapes it any more than he escapes his mother or the rest of his family.

In all of the author's novels, Eugene, or George Webber, or Tom Wolfe, or whatever name you want to call him, keeps on trying to escape. But his is never an empty flight. As he rushes towards his goal—and we are not until the end certain what that goal is—Eugene is eternally aware of the poetry of the world. He drinks it all in, the books, the food, the people, the forests. He is like a man with a cup forever at his lips.

An awareness of the tragedy of man's lot is implicit in *Look Homeward Angel* as it is in the later novels. Under the vitality is a brooding sorrow. But unlike the writers of the literature of disillusionment, Wolfe never gives up hope. It is this great passion for life, this tremendous gusto, that sets the books so far above the plain on which most novels lie. Wolfe is always trying, always hoping. In the last of his books, *You Can't Go Home Again*, he speaks of his belief, and formulates his creed in the letter to his friend, Fox, the editor who has done so much for him and with whom he has come to disagree.

"Man was born to live, to suffer, and to die, and what befalls him is a tragic lot," Wolfe writes. "There is no denying this in the final end. But we must, dear Fox, deny it all along the way!"

1. GROWING UP IN ALTAMONT

Look Homeward Angel

Wolfe once wrote the statement that fiction is an arrangement of fact. How does the novel carry out this idea?

What is his attitude towards the so-called upper classes and their economic security?

Comment on the various locales of the novels.

Additional Reading:

The Story of a Novel, by Thomas Wolfe, 1936. Scribner.

Hungry Gulliver, by Pamela Johnson, 1948. Scribner.

The Web and the Rock, by Thomas Wolfe, 1939. Harper.

You Can't Go Home Again, by Thomas Wolfe, 1940. Harper.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

First Meeting: APPROACHING THE NOVEL

1. Terms and Techniques
2. Viewing the Novel

Second Meeting: HUCKLEBERRY FINN: Mark Twain

1. Frontier America
2. Huck Finn and His Companions

Third Meeting: THE SCARLET LETTER: Nathaniel Hawthorne

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2. Hawthorne and his Novel

Fourth Meeting: FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD: Thomas Hardy

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Fifth Meeting: THE TURN OF THE SCREW: Henry James

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1. The Satire of Waugh
2. Oh, To Be in England

Twelfth Meeting: LOOK HOMEWARD ANGEL: Thomas Wolfe

1. Growing Up in Altamont
2. Wolfe and the American Scene

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A registration fee of \$7.00 is charged to clubs in North Carolina; \$10.00 elsewhere. For this fee, ten copies of the selected *Study Outline* are supplied, and all necessary books for preparing papers are lent during the club year. There are usually twelve chapters in each *Study Outline*. Each chapter has an explanatory introduction, lists of books to be discussed, and suggestions for developing each topic. To these are appended a complete list of all books recommended and the addresses of publishers. There is also a skeleton outline of the entire course for convenience in assigning dates and leaders.

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